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# It's a Beautiful Day in the Gayborhood

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# **It's a Beautiful Day in the Gayborhood**

*A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Liberal Studies*

by

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May, 2011

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*Master of Liberal Studies Program*

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## Introduction

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*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* is the longest running children's program on PBS. Fred Rogers stressed to his many child viewers the importance of accepting people for exactly who they were. Children loved his show because it offered a place where they felt accepted and understood, where everyone was welcome no matter what he or she looked like, or what he or she could or could not do.<sup>1</sup> Thornton Park is Orlando, Florida's trendiest neighborhood. It is beautiful, neatly kept, and full of commerce and culture, just like Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, and would probably have a comparable crime rate, if one could actually rate the crime of the puppets on the PBS set.

Thornton Park is also a gayborhood. Gayborhoods started in a dark place in America's history where gays and lesbians were marginalized. The definition of the term and its role has transformed over the years. The gayborhood began as the gay ghetto of containment for the marginalized populations of cities. It then turned into the gay village of sexual entertainment and bohemian culture. The village then transformed into the gay neighborhood of rainbow flags, gay activism, and queer economy.

The most recent form of the gayborhood can be seen in neighborhoods like Thornton Park. It is the newest version of a gayborhood because of its level of acceptance of the gay community, architectural beauty, and vibrant local economy and because it operates without the need to prove itself as or even physically label itself as a gay district. Thornton Park has generated its own social and economic power from the revitalization efforts that were primarily led by the LGBT community starting in the 1990s. Before the arrival of the gay community, Thornton Park didn't have a name, was

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<sup>1</sup> "Fred Rogers Bio," last modified January, 2011, <http://www.fci.org/new-site/mrn.html>.

run-down and full of low-income residents, and was home to the local crack house as well as other flop houses.

With the efforts of gay residents and individual developers like Phil Rumpy and friends, this neighborhood has changed significantly. It is now both a sought-after place of residence as well as one of the primary destinations for entertainment in the city of Orlando. As the affluent gay community moved in and began their revitalization efforts, so did the affluent straight community. Because of the level of acceptance of both gays and straights in the neighborhood, Thornton Park has become a perfect example of the modern day gayborhood. While it may not be the exact utopia of acceptance found on Fred Rogers' television show, for the low-income crowd is significantly marginalized by high rents and home prices, it is a gayborhood that is diverse and welcoming.

## **The History of the Gayborhood**

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The term “Gayborhood” cannot be found in the latest edition of *Webster’s Dictionary*. Instead it can be found online in the *Urban Dictionary*, which chronicles commonly used and accepted cultural slang terms that are not yet officially part of the English language. According to the Urban Dictionary, a gayborhood is any neighborhood with a high concentration of same-sex oriented individuals that contains homes, clubs, bars, restaurants, and other places of business and entertainment that cater to the residents and other visiting homosexuals.<sup>2</sup>

Gayborhoods have gone through a significant amount of change over the course of their history. Gays and lesbians have been severely marginalized historically and therefore forced to live on the fringes of society. As a result, gayborhoods formed as these “undesirables” flocked to poor areas in city centers. As the acceptance of gays and lesbians grew in the late twentieth century, so has the role and definition of gayborhoods. There is also an economic and political component that has had an effect on the definition, role, and importance of the gayborhood. Gayborhoods have been identified by other names that were more fitting to the culture of the time, for example: gay ghetto, gay village and gay neighborhood.

The first gayborhoods were part of immigrant ghettos located in large metropolitan areas like New York City in the late nineteenth century, such as Little Italy, China Town, or the Bowery. The gay community made up a small, but significant, portion of the population in these areas. These ghettos were a tool used by the city to confine and control their so-called undesirables, especially those who lived on the fringes

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<sup>2</sup> “Gayborhood,” accessed February, 2011, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/>.

of society and the large numbers of poor immigrants who were moving in to cities. These ghettos often turned into red light districts, areas of prostitution, which helped to provide the gay community a place of acceptance and employment.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1920s the gay ghetto became less of a place of confinement and more of an attraction to bohemians, gays, lesbians, and immigrants and became the gay village. Two specific examples were Greenwich Village and Harlem, again in New York City. The gay village was a place of experimentation with morals, gender roles, and a place of artistic and literary renaissance. It was a place of extravagant balls and sexual entertainment establishments. The village differed from the ghetto due to the increased acceptance of gays, although primarily for entertainment purposes. It was also different because people were actually attracted to these areas of the city, instead of the city using them as a means to confine their unwanted populations.

During the Red Scare of the 1940s and 1950s, the gay community went underground, and gay districts became unsafe places to frequent. For fear of being thrown in jail, for fear of losing one's career, or simply for fear of not meeting strict, newly formed gender roles set in place after World War Two, the gay community was forced to assimilate to survive. But soon thereafter, in the 1960s and 1970s, gay activism emerged with the Stonewall Inn Riots of 1969, and the gay neighborhood was born. The Castro District of San Francisco was the most well-known example of a gay neighborhood that proudly labeled itself as a gay district, and it became a growing political and economic force. With the increasing acceptance of gays in the public arena,

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<sup>3</sup> David Varady, *Desegregating the City: Ghettos, Enclaves, and Inequality* (London: University Press, 2006), 39-43.

more and more affluent gays were 'coming out of the closet' and investing in their gay neighborhood.

Thornton Park of Orlando, Florida is something completely different. While the gay ghetto and even the gay village were seen by society at large as a slum with a mix of poor, ethnic, and working-class minorities alongside the so-called sexual deviants of the LGBT community, the gay neighborhood was a place where being out and proud in public was encouraged. Thornton Park is the newest transformation. It is an upscale neighborhood located in a once poor and less populated part of the city and it has no need to mark its territory with rainbow flags. The affluent gay community has attracted high-end businesses and entertainment establishments where people, both gay and straight, come to socialize and spend money. In Thornton Park, being gay is the accepted norm and the need to advertise as a gay district is not needed.



## **The Gay Ghetto, 1890-1900s**

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The term ‘ghetto’ came from the confined area of Venice where Jews were compelled to live under the Venetian Republic.<sup>4</sup> It later began to be used widely as a designated area in European cities where Jews were confined to live by the Nazis during World War Two. The ghetto has a history of being used as a tool of containment and control.<sup>5</sup>

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the term ghetto in America came to be used to describe the urban areas inhabited by minority and immigrant groups that mainstream society deemed undesirable.<sup>6</sup> The city used these ghetto areas, or slums, as a means of segregating and confining their unwanted populations from the rest of the city. The minority groups confined to these ghettos included poor immigrants, ethnic minorities, and bohemians. Furthering the stigma of life in the ghetto was the presence of what society at the time labeled sexual deviants, including prostitutes, gays, and lesbians.<sup>7</sup>

The American use of the ghetto was significantly different from that of the Nazis because the population that lived in American ghettos was not physically forced to do so. However city officials indirectly forced this demographic to live in the slums by making these districts the only places cheap enough for them to afford. This also caused the ghettos to become overcrowded, dirty and unsafe areas. The rest of the city’s population

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<sup>4</sup> “Ghetto,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ghetto>, accessed February, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> “Ghetto,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ghetto>, accessed February, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Varady, *Desegregating the City*, 39-43.

Timothy Mason Bates, *The Political Economy of the Urban Ghetto* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 23-25.

<sup>7</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York; Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World: 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 140-167.

“Ghetto,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ghetto>, accessed February, 2011.

knew the borders of these neighborhoods and did not enter, except for the purpose of entertainment, especially prostitution.

Prostitution became rampant in the ghetto because of the cheap rents. As a result, many ghettos were also red-light districts where prostitutes could be found for hire. The residents of these ghettos were usually of the lower working-class from whom the middle and upper class citizens of the surrounding city desperately tried to separate themselves. The conditions were dismal with crowded living quarters and few, if any basic public services available to the residents.<sup>8</sup> Many of the establishments in these neighborhoods were geared towards the sex entertainment industry. These ghettos were not pleasant places to live, but they did provide a source of income for the gay community in this so called “degenerate” industry. They became a safe haven for gays and lesbians because their lifestyle was accepted, or at least tolerated, and they were allowed to live their lives without the backlash they would suffer elsewhere in society.

One of the most well-known gay ghettos was the Bowery, in turn-of-the-century New York City. “It is not surprising that the Bowery was the center of the city’s best known sites of homosexual rendezvous at the turn of the century, for it was a center of other ‘commercialized vice’ as well.”<sup>9</sup> Gay ghettos like the Bowery of New York City also played the role as a secret source of sexual entertainment and escape for middle and upper class men. These men were often trying to escape their mundane and stuffy

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<sup>8</sup> Robert M. Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880 – 1950* (New York: Yale University Press, 2003), 317-367.

<sup>9</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York; Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World*, 140-167.

married lives so they quietly sought out the services provided by these red-light districts.<sup>10</sup>

Around the time of the First World War the pace of economic and social change quickened. American life was starting to emphasize and encourage consumption, gratification, and pleasure.<sup>11</sup> This time served as a prelude to life during the Roaring Twenties. As a result of the desire for pleasure and sexual gratification, the number of red light districts increased providing a source of income for minorities and the gay community as prostitutes or workers in the erotic entertainment business.

At the same time there was a significant shift in the previously held social value system. The double standard regarding the roles of men and women in marriage was being challenged by educated and independent women. In decades prior, society expected women to live a life of purity and chastity even in the bounds of marriage, while men practically expected to explore any and all sexual urges. Societal norms allowed for men to actively seek out extra-marital sexual encounters. However, these separate spheres of middle-class wives and husbands were kept hidden from one another.<sup>12</sup> Men did not discuss their exploits with their wives, whom they wanted to keep untarnished by the ugly realities of the outside world. At the same time, women pretended not to know about their husbands' indiscretions even though they were face with the negative consequences

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<sup>10</sup> Lane Goldfield, *The Enduring Ghetto* (New York: Lippincott, 1973), 12-15.

<sup>11</sup> John D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters :A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 238-256.

<sup>12</sup> D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 238-256.

of said behaviors.<sup>13</sup> Also a part of the cultural shift, women were leaving the home and entering the work place and college as well as entering into professional careers.

Societal pressure, which included the constriction of gender roles and the socio-economic confines of class, created an environment from which escape was highly desirable. Ghettos, like the Bowery, were ground zero for such escapists. These areas attracted both the lower and middle-classes – the former for income and the later for entertainment. Most attractive to middle-class men was the anonymity that the ghetto provided. They could experiment sexually without corrupting their family sphere.<sup>14</sup>

Besides just a place of prostitution, the Bowery was also home to what many called “fairy resorts.” These resorts were home to cross dressers, openly gay men, called fairies, gentlemanly women who desired other women, and drag queens. These resorts showcased racy music, dancing and drinking. The presence of prostitutes and erotic entertainment made for a welcoming environment for the gay community. The relaxed sexual morals of the community helped gays feel free to live an openly gay lifestyle.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to those who participated in the “debauchery” there were also those that came to the Bowery as onlookers. These “slummers” did not come for sexual services but rather came to see shows of outrageous behavior, bawdy entertainment and the flamboyant cross dressers. As George Chauncey puts it, “most slummers were

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<sup>13</sup> D’Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 238-256.

<sup>14</sup> D’Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 238-256

<sup>15</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York; Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World*, 140-167.

suitably scandalized by what they saw, [yet] many were also titillated.”<sup>16</sup> Witnessing sexual deviation from the norm was an arousing alternative to their everyday lives.

This is why ghettos, although poor, overcrowded, and run-down, were considered safe havens by the gay community as well as the other marginalized groups who lived there. The moral constraints of society at large stopped at the neighborhoods’ boundaries. People were allowed to enter and explore alternative ways of being without fearing the negative backlash that they would likely receive in other parts of the city. The Bowery of New York City was both a spectacle and a haven.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York; Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World*, 140-167.

<sup>17</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York; Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World*, 140-167.  
Joseph Harry, *The Social Organization of Gay Males* (New York: Praeger, 1978), 214-216.

## **The Gay Village, 1910s - 1930s**

Societal changes during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s allowed the gay ghetto to evolve into the gay village. Probably the most well-known gay village from the 1910s to 1930s was Greenwich Village, in New York City. This gay village, along with Harlem, has many similarities to the gay ghetto from a few decades prior. It was still an area frequented and inhabited by prostitutes, gay men and lesbians, bohemians and ethnic minorities. But what changed the poor ghetto into a more prosperous village was the growing presence of what some historians called 'queer economy.' There was also a stronger connection between the queer society and the bohemian society who shared the village as their home.<sup>18</sup>

The nightlife that existed in Greenwich Village and Harlem, much like the Bowery, was one of clubs, bars, and cafes. The thriving entertainment industry that catered to the gay community grew significantly, especially between 1920 and 1933. Others along with the gay community were attracted to the village because of access to cheap alcohol during Prohibition.<sup>19</sup> The Italian residents of Greenwich Village ran restaurants, grocery stores, drugstores, and other shops known for homemade Italian wine and other liquor supplies.<sup>20</sup> This drew men and women, gay and straight alike, from the city and its periphery to the area making Greenwich Village the first gayborhood.

In addition to the Old World Charm and relative sense of security of Greenwich Village, gays and lesbians were able to blend with the Bohemian culture. A bohemian is

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<sup>18</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World*, 140-167.  
John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 34-65.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander B. Callow Jr., *American Urban Histor*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 12-45.

<sup>20</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World*, 140-167.

someone who, as a writer or an artist, lives an unconventional life, usually in a colony with others.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the development of the gay niche and the bohemian niche coincided with one another.<sup>22</sup> Bohemians, much like gays and lesbians, were attracted to neighborhoods like the Village for their cheap rents, cheap restaurants, and entertainment establishments. Due to the lower socioeconomic status of these neighborhoods, it was less likely that residents could or would discriminate making for a reputation of tolerance and acceptance of those who are considered to be outside the “norm” of society.

Not far away in New York City, Harlem was considered by authors like Steven Watson as the black Greenwich Village. The Harlem Renaissance blossomed starting in the 1920s through the 1930s. It was a literary and intellectual movement within the black community that was very bohemian in nature. During this time a young generation of black writers flourished in Harlem because of its social fluidity, much like that of Greenwich Village. Harlem also served as a mecca for black gays and lesbians. Just like Greenwich Village, Harlem was home to many drag balls and bars where gays and bohemians alike congregated. In Steven Watson’s, *The Harlem Renaissance*, Harlem was described as a, “gaudy conglomeration of homosexual and lesbian hangouts reflected a zone in which sexualities of all stripes could flourish.”<sup>23</sup>

Both Greenwich Village and Harlem were transformed by the opening of subway lines and other forms of transportation after World War One, connecting the neighborhoods with the rest of the city. The addition of public transportation made

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<sup>21</sup> “Ghetto,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ghetto>, accessed February, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York; Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World*, 140-167.

<sup>23</sup> Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African-American Culture, 1920-193*, (New York: Pantheon, 1996), 23-34.

Greenwich Village much more accessible to people who lived in other parts of the city and beyond. Thanks to this access, many people, including downtown business men, found it a more convenient place to live. Real estate in Greenwich Village was quickly becoming a sought after commodity. The combination of accessibility, urban living, and historic architectural charm that characterize the development of Greenwich Village remains the sought-after set of characteristics for gayborhoods today.<sup>24</sup>

The increased economic and population flow coming in and out of the Village and Harlem caught the attention of city authorities. Many city officials considered neighborhoods like Greenwich Village and Harlem havens for social undesirables whether gay, poor, bohemian, ethnic, or prostitute. Zoning ordinances were used as a tool in an attempt to control these undesirables. The first attempt was made in 1916 in New York City. City official catered to upper and middle-class districts by confining manufacturing and commercial establishments to poor neighborhoods. This divided and segregated the city's neighborhoods by ethnicity, class and "moral" distinctions.<sup>25</sup> These types of zoning ordinances were successful because the lower class, comprised of the poor and various ethnic minorities, needed steady employment regardless of the work conditions. Therefore, the undesirable people and industries stayed out of sight of upper and middle class neighborhoods.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Heise, *Degenerate Sex and the City: Djuana Barne's Urban Underworld* (Michigan: Twentieth Century Literature, 2009), 3-9.  
Fogelson, *Downtown*, 317-367.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Heise, *Degenerate Sex and the City* (New York: Twentieth Century Literature: 2009), 3-9.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Callow, Jr., *American Urban History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), 12-45.  
Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America; A History of the Place and the People Who Made it* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 345-367.  
Fogelson, *Downtown*, 317-367.



Gay villages like Greenwich Village and Harlem experienced some growing pains in their transition from pre- to post-World War One. With the increase in affluence and the socioeconomic and racial segregation created by new zoning laws, Greenwich Village especially, went through an identity crisis. It went from a bohemian place of solace and refuge to a gay village extraordinaire. Many of the first Villagers, artists and political radicals who helped to shape the culture of the neighborhood, disliked the metamorphosis of their neighborhood. As a result, they looked for new place to live their alternative lifestyle. According to many bohemians, “the postwar Village seemed to have lost the intimacy, intellectual ferment, and genuinely bohemian aspect of its halcyon prewar days.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York; Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World*, 140-167. Elizabeth Tarpley Adams, “Making the Sprawl Vivid: Narrative and Queer Los Angeles” *Western Folklore* 58 (1999): 175-193.

### **Gay Community and Districts Go Underground, 1940s – 1950s**

The gay village of the 1920s and 1930s was affected by major social, cultural, and economic events like World War One, Prohibition, and the Great Depression. While the physical make-up of the gay village remained the same throughout all three events; a place of refuge for the gays and lesbians, ethnic minorities, poorer working-class and bohemians, until the end of World War Two, the role dramatically changed. During the Red Scare of the 1940s and 1950s, the gay community was forced to go underground causing gay districts became dangerous places to visit.

American historians often describe the years following World War Two as an age of anxiety. This anxiety was caused by a fear of communism being unleashed both at home and abroad onto the American cultural landscape. This included gender-related anxieties like fear of women remaining in the workforce, waning masculinity of men, and homosexuality.<sup>28</sup> The tension regarding gender roles increased due to the vast numbers of men going off to war and women filling those job vacancies. This caused confusion over the femininity of women and the masculinity of men. The result was that gender roles became very rigid, which proved to be especially difficult for the gay community.

This need for the gay community to conform to strict gender roles caused a major shift within the gay community. It began when large numbers of gay men joined the military during World War Two and were forced to adopt a more masculine demeanor in order to survive the extremely macho military environment. The threat of communism caused Americans to be suspicious of anyone who behaved outside of the norm and

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<sup>28</sup> Craig M. Loftin, "Unacceptable Mannerisms: Gender Anxieties, Homosexual Activism, and Swish in the United States, 1945-1965," *Journal of Social History* (2007): 89-93.

considered them dangerous, a degenerate or at worst, a communist. Being discharged from the military or arrested by the police for a homosexual offense destroyed careers as well as future career opportunities for many people.<sup>29</sup>

As a result, the gay community was forced to assimilate and go underground during the 1940s and 1950s. The Homophile Movement began as a result of this behavioral, social, and cultural shift within the gay community. The movement was centered on the passing of homosexuals as heterosexuals as a form of social survival. The masculine behavior that was adopted while they were soldiers was held up as the new standard of gay males. Those who refused to adopt this outward attempt to appear masculine and heterosexual were labeled “Swish.”<sup>30</sup> Swish males typically behaved in an effeminate and flamboyant manner, deemed undesirable, which caused a split within the gay male world. It became crucial for the gay community to blend in and not be recognized to secure their socioeconomic status in society.

The high level of anxiety during the Red Scare not only caused a split within the gay community, it also caused the patronage of gay establishments and gay districts to be considered dangerous by the gay community. The most visible male homosexuals during the early decades of the twentieth century were the flamboyant Swish, otherwise called fairies or pansies due to their feminine behavior.<sup>31</sup> The Swish remained visible in gay neighborhoods, drawing negative attention to the gay community at large. Members of the Homophile Movement desperately began to separate themselves from them. They

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<sup>29</sup>Loftin, “Unacceptable Mannerisms,” 89-93.

<sup>30</sup>Loftin, “Unacceptable Mannerisms,” 89-93.

Martin Meeker, “Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice, 1950s and 1960s,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10 (2001):78-116.

<sup>31</sup> Loftin, “Unacceptable Mannerisms,” 89-93.

verbally bashed the effeminate gay men and publically disapproved of their behavior because they feared attracting the attention of police and jeopardizing their now secret locations making them more vulnerable to arrests and raids.<sup>32</sup>

The gay community of the 1940s and 1950s was characterized by its non-existence in the public sphere. While gay districts and neighborhoods still existed, they became, once again, unsafe places to frequent or to be seen. For fear of police raids, many gays and lesbians stopped going to the public areas of gay neighborhoods and sought out more secret underground gay establishments instead. Not only did the gay patrons go stealth, so did the actual gay neighborhood and its establishments.<sup>33</sup> The gay village did not disappear but the majority of homosexuals did, until the late 1960s and 1970s.

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<sup>32</sup> Loftin, "Unacceptable Mannerisms," 89-93.

Meeker, "Behind the Mask of Respectability", 78-116.

David S. Churchill, "Transnationalism and Homophile Political Culture in the Postwar Decades," *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15 (2009): 31-66.

<sup>33</sup> Loftin, "Unacceptable Mannerisms," 89-93.

## **The Gay Neighborhood, 1960s – 1980s**

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The gay community began to reemerge in the 1960s and its impact was three-fold: social, economic, and political. The economy of the gay neighborhood had been developing since the gay ghetto. The social culture of the gay neighborhood developed as well with some significant changes happening in relation to historical events like the Stonewall Inn Riots in 1969. But the political aspect of the gay neighborhood was the newest facet and emerged during the 1960s.

The economic dynamics can be observed as far back as the 1890s within the confines of the gay ghetto. The ghetto was, by definition, an area of poor working-class men and women including ethnic minorities, gays, and bohemians; it was also a place for businesses that relied on the gay community, as well as the others, to thrive. The residents and visitors frequented bath houses, cafes, bars, and clubs. These places remained cheap entertainment for the low-income neighborhood residents. In the 1960s, there was an emergence of queer-specific economy and the desire to expand the gay economic market.<sup>34</sup>

From the 1960s to the 1980s there was an increase in the number of visible upper-income gays and lesbians. The gay rights movement was making significant strides, especially after the Stonewall Riots of 1969, which allowed already affluent gays and lesbians to feel more comfortable about being known in public.<sup>35</sup> With the increase of

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<sup>34</sup> Harry, *The Social Organization of Gay Males*, 214-216.

<sup>35</sup> Leila J. Rupp, *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 140-241.

Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (New York: University of California Press, 2005), 23-89.

Harry, *The Social Organization of Gay Males*, 214-216.

the number of gays who had money to spend, came the development of more gay-specific establishments. Gay neighborhoods began to emerge in Los Angeles and San Francisco and mutated from working-class gay safe havens and places of spectacle, to more residential middle and upper-class places of art, culture, and money.<sup>36</sup> With this turn of economic events, businessmen and entrepreneurs, gay and straight, saw this concentration of upper-income individuals as a place to invest and make profit.

An example of this gay economic growth was discussed in 1977 the national gay newspaper, the *Advocate*. The article described the development of a ghetto of male homosexuals in the Castro area of San Francisco:

Single men with excess income began moving in, buying up the old houses and using their leisure time to renovate the area. By 1967 a few gay bars were doing business. By the early 70s, gay business people began leasing the deserted storefronts. The trend became an explosion in 1974. Housing costs skyrocketed. Young single men could afford it. Middle-class families, meanwhile, couldn't afford to pass up the top dollars offered for their homes. The population dug in.<sup>37</sup>

This trend of the gay community having more and more economic power continues to hold true in present-day neighborhoods like Thornton Park in Orlando.

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<sup>36</sup> Harry, *The Social Organization of Gay Males*, 214-216.

<sup>37</sup> Harry, *The Social Organization of Gay Males*, 214-216.

Besides the growing economic power of the gay neighborhood there was also further development of the social impact that the gay neighborhood had on its residents as well as the surrounding community. The gay neighborhood expanded its role from protector to promoter. When the gay neighborhood was the ghetto or the village, the LGBT community flocked to these neighborhoods because they were safe havens. These neighborhoods allowed gays and lesbians a certain amount of freedom and distance from the moral judgment of society. In the 1960s the gay neighborhood continued to serve the gay community in this capacity as safe haven but also allowed for them to be more visible socially, economically, and politically.<sup>38</sup>

The gay neighborhoods of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, also offered social networks for the gay citizens who resided within their borders. The LGBT community, while living in close quarters, provided each other access to gay-friendly services, establishments, events, and other gay-oriented information. This information was also disseminated through the newly emerging gay-centered newspapers, magazines, like the *Advocate* in 1977, and journals that were growing in number.<sup>39</sup> Businesses as well as social event organizers could advertise specifically to the gay community. This was much easier to do within the confines of a gay-concentrated neighborhood. The queer economy was growing and becoming a viable entity.

Despite all these seemingly positive gains, not all homosexuals are now or were united in their desire to live in gay neighborhoods. The politics of these gay-centered

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<sup>38</sup> Harry, *The Social Organization of Gay Males*, 214-216.

<sup>39</sup> Christopher Hewitt, "The Socioeconomic Position of Gay Men: A Review of Evidence," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 54 (1995): 461-179.

neighborhoods were not always so agreeable. There was argument from gays on both sides of the issue, those for the gay neighborhood and those against it. Some felt that living in a gay-specific district filled with rainbow flags as their markers put them back to the margins of society and further set them apart from everyone else. Others felt that a gay neighborhood served as place of pride and culture where gay people could live openly and be successful. One area of agreement, however, was that the political significance of the gay neighborhood began with the Stonewall Riots in 1969.<sup>40</sup>

The Stonewall Riots took place in a familiar gay district, Greenwich Village. The Stonewall Inn was a well-known gay bar in the Village, and the owners and customers were accustomed to frequent police raids. “This time, however, bar patrons fought back instead of passively enduring humiliating treatment. Their response initiated a riot that lasted into the night.”<sup>41</sup> The Stonewall riots are typically viewed by historians as the spark of the gay liberation movement and a turning point in the history of gay life in the United States, and they are commemorated in gay pride parades around the globe. While the gay community was united after the tragedy at Stonewall in many ways, this sense of unity did not include every political issue. Canada provides a good example of this political divide within the gay community. Catherine Jean Nash postulated the idea that the politics associated with gay districts went through three distinct phases: assimilation, liberation and spatializing homosexual rights.

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<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Armstrong, “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth,” *American Sociological Review* 71 (2006): 724-751.

D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 34-65.

Rupp, *A Desired Past*, 140-241.

<sup>41</sup> Armstrong, “Movements and Memory,” 724-751.



The first political groups were the assimilationists, much like those of the homophile movement of the 1940s and 1950s. They saw that, “exclusively gay spaces wrongly segregated homosexuals from mainstream society in an oppressive and marginal ‘ghetto’.”<sup>42</sup> The liberationists wanted to challenge sex and gender norms and categories rather than assert a strictly homosexual identity. They also considered the labeling of a gay neighborhood as being too restrictive. The third phase, Nash states, was that of spatializing homosexual rights. This movement was one of cleaning up and changing the historical image of the gay community as it existed in the gay ghettos. The new desired image was more suburban, like that coming out of the 1950s, and less urban, which was usually equated with looser morals and deviant behavior.<sup>43</sup>

The political climate that came out of gay neighborhoods and the Stonewall Inn Riots reached its pinnacle when Harvey Milk became the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in California in 1977.<sup>44</sup> He moved from New York City to the Castro District of San Francisco in 1972, for many of the same reasons every other gay man had migrated and settled there, because of the acceptance and protection the gay community experienced. He realized that the gay community was growing in power as an entity across the country so he chose to run for a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, serving district number 5, the Castro District, a well-known and well-marked gay neighborhood. Despite being assassinated in 1978, he used his eleven months of service to pass many gay rights ordinances for the city of San Francisco. This

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<sup>42</sup> Catherine Jean Nash, “Toronto’s gay village (1969-1982): Plotting the politics of gay identity,” *Canadian Geographer* 50 (2006): 1-16.

<sup>43</sup> Nash, “Toronto’s gay village,” 1-16.

<sup>44</sup> *The Times of Harvey Milk*, DVD, directed by Rob Epstein (1984; San Francisco: Black Sand Productions, 2000).

is just one example of how the gay community and the gay neighborhood was becoming a serious political force.

## **Conclusion**

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Although the word gayborhood is considered a slang term in modern English, it does have historic roots. It has been a term that has changed concurrently with the major changes in society. As the behavioral and moral norms changed within societal roles, so has the role of the gayborhood. It began as a slum area, staying close to its root definition of a ghetto. It changed again to safe haven and place of creative experimentation, whether literary, artistic or sexual in the gay village. Thirdly it morphed into a middle-class gay neighborhood with economic, social and political power. Finally, as will be shown later in this project by looking specifically at the Thornton Park neighborhood, it has evolved to become an upper-class, cultural, artistic and economic powerhouse.

### **Short History of the City**

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Social and cultural changes have not only affected the role of the gayborhood they have also affected the migration of the gay community to and from gayborhoods. One of the most important factors has been the role of the American city. From the late nineteenth century through the 1950s and 1960s, the city's importance, role, and demographic and physical make-up have gone through significant change which, in turn, caused great changes to the gayborhood. Historic events like World War One, World War Two and the Great Depression had a significant effect on the gay community, the gayborhood, as well as the American city.

The first major change to the American city began in the 1800s with Industrial Revolution. The increase of industrial and manufacturing jobs during this time caused a significant population increase in America's urban centers. With the coming of the Great Depression these urban populations significantly declined. People moved to the countryside where they could share space with other family members and potentially grow their own food to survive.<sup>45</sup> With the end of the Great Depression and the economy reenergized due to World War Two, people were once again becoming prosperous. Instead of moving back to the city many people chose the newly popular suburban lifestyle that came about during and after World War Two. In the late 1960s and 1970s people slowly began to move back into large urban areas, but it was not a significant enough of a migration to bring back the economic power which cities once enjoyed. As a

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<sup>45</sup> Callow Jr., *American Urban History*, 12-45.

result, city officials and businessmen began a movement of urban revitalization, in an attempt to attract residents back to the downtown districts of America's cities.<sup>46</sup>

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the nation experienced a significant growth in industry fueled by the Industrial Revolution and World War One. Heavy industry and manufacturing became the economic mainstay of many of the larger cities in the United States including New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia. People flocked to these urban areas to find work in the booming economy. This influx in population proved to be difficult to handle for city officials.<sup>47</sup> They were forced to deal with new issues of overcrowding, sanitation, transportation, as well as racial and ethnic tensions within city neighborhoods.

The worst sections of cities were their ghettos. These poor ghetto areas were dirty and over-crowded due to the lack of public services provided. The working-class immigrants who flocked to the city centers to find work could not afford to live anywhere else so they would crowd together in large tenement buildings. While many middle and upper-class people still frequented parts of the city for night life entertainment, the urban centers of America quickly earned a negative reputation for low living standards. "The industrial city was a 'new element' in history because it was an agent of social change, a

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<sup>46</sup> Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 345-367.  
Fogelson, *Downtown*, 317-367.

<sup>47</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 317-367.  
Bryce, *Revitalizing Cities*, 92.  
Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 345-367..

dynamic force that caused a reorientation of the traditional cultural structure of behavior and thought.”<sup>48</sup>

The coming of the Great Depression sparked a major and, some still argue, permanent change to cities in the United States. With the fall out of the economy in the early 1930s, many businesses had to close their doors and major industries came to a halt. People throughout the United States were without work and without a means to feed their families. The severe decentralization of America’s cities began. The people who had the means turned to the countryside and other areas outside of the city in an attempt to survive the depression. This left store fronts, factories and residential buildings empty. The downtown districts of many urban centers continued to become more and more blighted and stayed eerily empty until the Great Depression ended.<sup>49</sup>

After a decade of population decline primarily during the 1930s, the urban population left behind were mostly low-income and a member of an ethnic minority. The city no longer provided certain public services to help the residents maintain standards of living and the residents themselves no longer had the means to maintain their inner-city neighborhoods on their own. The unfortunate result was that these areas were left for ruin. The businesses that once resided in these areas left empty store fronts, homes were either left vacant or those which had residents were not maintained and often became dilapidated flophouses.<sup>50</sup> The population decline that began in the late 1800s left many urban centers in both economic and physical ruin.

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<sup>48</sup> Callow, Jr., *American Urban History*, 147.

<sup>49</sup> Callow, Jr., *American Urban History*, 147.

<sup>50</sup> Abhijeet Chavan, *Planetizen Contemporary Debates in Urban Planning*, (New York: Island Press, 2007) 130-208.

After World War Two and the end of the Great Depression the American economy slowly began to recover. City officials expected their downtown activity to return to normal. The economy recovered slowly but the urban centers of America did not. Besides New York and perhaps one or two other large cities, downtown's daytime population was not going up much, if at all.<sup>51</sup> People and business alike stayed on the periphery of city centers, causing smaller business districts to grow. People no longer needed to make the trek into downtown to shop or find entertainment. They could now do so in their own neighborhoods outside of the city. This phenomenon marked the beginning of urban sprawl and the rise of the suburb.

This movement to the suburbs was selective in nature. While the upper and middle-classes had the means to migrate to the suburbs, the low-income immigrants were forced to stay in the ever growing ghettos of the city center. Those low-income and ethnic minorities who were able to make the move often chose to stay in the city because of cultural familiarity and community. With this continued movement of middle and upper-classes moving out of the city centers and the poor immigrants staying put, the city's ghettos grew and furthered the reputation of the city as being a dirty and often dangerous place to live and frequent.<sup>52</sup>

In the 1940s and 1950s, businessmen, property owners and city officials began a movement to actively attract the middle and upper-class people back to cities. They recognized that downtown needed to be cleaner, brighter and more attractive before people would leave their conservative suburban lifestyle. Downtown Associations began

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<sup>51</sup> Fogelson, *Downtown*, 221-222.

<sup>52</sup> Callow, *American Urban History*, 318.

to form in major cities all over the United States. Their goal was to revitalize their urban centers and make them new and attractive to both residents and businesses once again. Beautification projects as well as transportation improvement projects became popular for public city officials as a way to promote their city's economy and hopefully also gain election votes. Some beautification projects were limited to specific neighborhoods, others spanned entire cities.<sup>53</sup>

The issue of the need for improved transportation between the suburbs and downtown also became a great concern for those involved in the efforts to revive urban centers. City officials recognized that with the increasing popularity of the automobile, the upper-class people who owned them would travel to city centers if it was not convenient. They also realized that everyone else who could not afford a car also needed a convenient way to get in and around the city.<sup>54</sup> This caused a great need for city officials and Downtown Associations to add tram lines for the lower-class and improve the city roads for the upper-class.

This sentiment of attempting to bring people and culture back to the cities of America continued throughout the 1960s, 1970s and still exists today. A more recent phenomenon that began as a result of the urban revitalization movement was gentrification. Gentrification is the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents.<sup>55</sup> Since about the 1960s, gentrification has been a process often linked to the

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<sup>53</sup> Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 345-367.

Herrington Bryce, *Revitalizing Cities* (Toronto: Lexington Books, 1979), 92.

<sup>54</sup> Christopher W. Wells, "The Road to the Model T: Culture, Road Conditions, and Innovation at the Dawn of the American Motor Age," *Technology and Culture* 48 (2007): 497-523.

<sup>55</sup> "Gentrification," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gentrification>, accessed March 11, 2011.



formation of gayborhoods in cities. Gentrification has proven to be a controversial subject in the urban planning field. While often times the term gentrification has a negative connotation, it can also be accompanied by great revitalization efforts in once run-down neighborhoods like Orlando's Thornton Park.

## **Gentrification and Urban Revitalization**

Gentrification often brings about mixed feelings in people when used in describing the urban revitalization of a city neighborhood. There are significant benefits which come with the revitalization or gentrification of a once run-down or dilapidated neighborhood. The neighborhood physically, socially, and culturally changes for the better. Unfortunately there are also negative effects that result from the revitalization of a neighborhood, namely the displacement of its original residents. This displacement is an in-direct result of the raised rents and property taxes that occur after a neighborhood becomes more affluent.

Gentrification begins when middle-class, affluent men and women begin to buy and refurbish property in dilapidated neighborhoods. One of the major draws for affluent people to these low-income neighborhoods was the low rents and property costs.<sup>56</sup> A single professional with a decent amount of disposable income can move in and buy an inexpensive home, invest money for refurbishing costs, then turn around and sell the property for a large profit a short time later. The other major draw to these neighborhoods, especially for the gay community who typically do not have children but have dual incomes, was the sense of old world charm in the historic architecture of the buildings and the often times brick-lined tree shaded streets. These people could come into these areas and see the potential of the homes and also actually had the means to return the run-down homes and store fronts to their former glory.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> John Norquist, *Planetizen Contemporary Debates in Urban Planning*, (New York: Island Press, 2007), 5.1.

<sup>57</sup> John Norquist, *Planetizen Contemporary Debates in Urban Planning*, (New York: Island Press, 2007), 5.1.

The urban revitalization movement was not a new idea but it came to its peak in the 1970s. Certain neighborhoods of older cities especially, were attracting young middle-class and upper-class residents. These residents wanted to escape suburbia and create new neighborhood communities within the city limits where they already enjoyed frequenting for entertainment.<sup>58</sup> Those who participated in the neighborhood movement observed common philosophies regarding urban revitalization. They all shared a respect for the existing physical structure of the urban center and generally wished to preserve the city's buildings. None favored large-scale clearance or redevelopment.<sup>59</sup>

The gay community has had a significant role in the urban revitalization of many city neighborhoods since the 1970s and 1980s. Most urban centers around the United States have at least one neighborhood that has been restored and is also considered a gayborhood. A few, usually gay men, move into and refurbish a beautiful old house in a run-down neighborhood and many quickly follow suit until the entire neighborhood is something completely new and now bustling with business and proud residents.<sup>60</sup>

When this happens there are many benefits to be had by both the original residents who chose to stay and the new residents who have made this new gayborhood their home. Benefits such as a rise in property values, lowered crime rates, increased business and economic prosperity as well as the overall beautification of the neighborhood itself come with urban revitalization. The original residents who choose to

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<sup>58</sup>Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 249.

<sup>59</sup> Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance*, 242.

<sup>60</sup> Dereka Rushbrook, "Cities, Queer Space, and the Cosmopolitan Tourist," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 8 (2002): 2-6.

leave are able to take part in these benefits as well. They are able to sell their homes for a larger profit than they would have received previously.

The film, *Flag Wars*, documented a perfect example of this phenomenon in Columbus, Ohio. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, a significant number of young professional white gay men began to buy and renovate homes in a run-down, low-income, predominantly black neighborhood in Columbus. The transformation seemed to happen reasonably quickly. In the beginning there were random houses on different blocks being refurbished. After just a few years many square blocks had multiple homes being bought up and refurbished by gay men.<sup>61</sup>

The original residents did seem to enjoy the aesthetic beauty brought to these once run-down homes of their neighbors. They also seemed to enjoy the lowering of the crime rate due to the increase of police patrols and other basic public services now being provided more regularly to the neighborhood. All property values increased, whether a refurbished home or a home that an original resident was looking to sell.<sup>62</sup>

Many of the gay men followed in the documentary were mostly concerned with saving the historic houses and neighborhoods from complete destruction. They also had the financial means to do so. As for some of their thoughts on the residents already living in this neighborhood, one of the men said, “If they’re not going to renovate the home they shouldn’t live in the home.”<sup>63</sup> This draws attention to one of the shortcomings of urban revitalization or gentrification, which is the fact that low-income inhabitants are often

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<sup>61</sup> *Flag Wars*, DVD, directed by Linda Goode Bryant (2003; Ohio: Zula/Pearl Productions Inc., 2011)

<sup>62</sup> *Flag Wars*, DVD, directed by Linda Goode Bryant (2003; Ohio: Zula/Pearl Productions Inc., 2011)

<sup>63</sup> *Flag Wars*, DVD, directed by Linda Goode Bryant (2003; Ohio: Zula/Pearl Productions Inc., 2011)

inadvertently forced to sell their homes and move out of the neighborhood where they grew up.

The cause of the displacement of the low-income residents is usually two-fold. The first cause is the rise in rent and property taxes. When the standard of living is increased throughout the neighborhood the property values also increase, which is desirable. But with the rise in property values comes the rise of property taxes which must be paid by those who own and rent their property. To make up for the increase in taxes paid, owners are forced to raise their rents to make up the difference. This causes an indirect displacement of the low-income residents who can no longer afford the new rents.<sup>64</sup> There is a similar danger of the local companies where the residents work being forced out by these higher rents.<sup>65</sup> Since they can no longer afford to pay the increased property taxes, or rents, they are inadvertently forced to move to another neighborhood.

The second cause of displacement during gentrification is the historic preservation process of homes and neighborhoods. In the 1970s, the National Trust for Historic Preservation inaugurated its Main Street Pilot Project, applying doctrines of historic preservation to commercial revitalization in small cities. The large scale of urban renewals' damage gave urgency to the new goal of protecting districts in addition to preserving individual landmarks.<sup>66</sup> This movement was brought about with good intentions, but unfortunately, with regards to the low-income residents who may own one of these properties, the historic preservation process can actually become a cause for having to sell and move.

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<sup>64</sup> Norquist, *Planetizen Contemporary Debates in Urban Planning*, 5.1.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Moses, "Gentrification," *Commonweal* 133 (2006): 10.

<sup>66</sup> Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 345-367.

The problem comes about with the enforcement of building codes that come into place after a house or building has been deemed a historic property by a local historic preservation board. Sometimes, these local historic preservation boards put regulations in place to maintain certain standards regarding a building's exterior aesthetics, functionality of utilities and more. Many of the original residents cannot afford to make these adjustments that are necessary to keep their homes up to code. City officials are then forced to fine the residents for violating these regulations. This results in the resident having to choose to sell their home and move to a cheaper neighborhood or stay and attempt to pay higher property taxes. It can also prove to be an obstacle for the new residents attempting to renovate their newly bought homes.<sup>67</sup>

While the historic preservation process can lead to a negative outcome for some, it also has a very positive role in revitalizing older neighborhoods. According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation website, there are many economic benefits of preservation. Some of these benefits are:

“1. Dollar for dollar, historic preservation is one of the highest job-generating economic development options available. 2. Job creation spurred by historic preservation begins in construction and the trades. 3. Job creation extends beyond construction. 4. Historic preservation creates more jobs than the same amount of new construction. 5. Historic preservation has a multiplier effect. 6. Historic preservation provides a greater benefit to

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<sup>67</sup> *Flag Wars*, DVD, directed by Linda Goode Bryant (2003; Ohio: Zula/Pearl Productions Inc., 2011)

local suppliers and 7. Historic rehabilitation is often a counter-cyclical activity that helps stabilize the local economy during an economic downturn.”<sup>68</sup>

Not only does historic preservation provide a sustainable economy, an increase in jobs and the use of local suppliers, but it is also a way to save older neighborhoods from total destruction. It prevents the “tear down and rebuild” approach to revitalization and instead relies on the refurbishing and redevelopment of existing historic structures.

Along with the positive effects of the historic preservation process that often accompanies urban revitalization, there are also other significant gains brought on by the forming of a new gayborhood. The effects of urban revitalization, as mentioned before, include lowered crime rates, increased amount of public services to the area, increase in local economic vitality and increased property values. All residents of the neighborhood enjoy and benefit from these gains.

The influx of affluent people into an area attracts certain attention to both themselves and the physical neighborhood they inhabit. They demand access to public services and safety measures by the city, which benefits the original residents as well. City officials see the increased financial activity in these neighborhoods and often times, although sometimes slowly, begin to offer more assistance in the revitalization of the neighborhood. Beautification projects are started that help to clean up the neighborhood including adding brick streets lined with landscaping and repaved sidewalks.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> “community revitalization,” <http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/community-revitalization/community-revitalization.html>, accessed march 23, 2011.

<sup>69</sup> Rushbrook, “Cities, Queer Space, and the Cosmopolitan Tourist,” 2-6.

This new attention given by the city can be increased when speaking specifically of a gayborhood. With the rise in number of gay men and women in a concentrated area comes a need for gay-centered events. Usually the first to arrive are gay pride parades. Gay pride parades usually start with the small gay community that has developed in the gayborhood. The event is self-organized and starts on a small scale, but as more and more people of the LGBT community move into the area, the pride parade and its surrounding events begin to grow in size. These events then begin to attract gay tourists from other parts of the state and country, as well as an increasing amount of local vendors. The city at large is forced to recognize the impact these events have on the economy and a path to gay acceptance is laid.<sup>70</sup>

The final phase of acceptance as well as outright support by the city is the attraction of both gay and straight tourists to the gay events. The local government cannot help but see the economic potential of the gay community as well as ignore the desire to “diversify” the city which will attract tourists and residents to the rest of the city.<sup>71</sup> The result is that city officials and businesses stop seeing the gay community as merely consumers but more importantly as a commodity. They are a commodity because they attract business and commerce.<sup>72</sup>

This idea of the gay community as being a commodity is realized by the number of new businesses attracted to gayborhoods. With the increase of houses being refurbished and public spaces being beautified, the next step is the attraction of new

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<sup>70</sup> Rushbrook, “Cities, Queer Space, and the Cosmopolitan Tourist,” 2-6.  
Bryce, *Revitalizing Cities*, 92.

<sup>71</sup> Fritz W. Wagner, *Managing capital resources for central city revitalization* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 83.

<sup>72</sup> Rushbrook, “Cities, Queer Space, and the Cosmopolitan Tourist,” 2-6.



businesses. The new residents not only want to renovate an historic house but they also want to walk to local shops, cafes and bars for their entertainment. Before they were gayborhoods, these neighborhoods previously had very few entertainment establishments or other businesses. But with an inflow of money into the neighborhood to be spent, comes the development of new establishments to fill in that need. The neighborhood is not only becoming beautiful and more safe but also more economically sustainable.<sup>73</sup>

As the neighborhood grows in prosperity both aesthetically, socially and economically, more and more middle and upper-class people are attracted to the area, both to live and to frequent. Often times it takes less than 15 years for a neighborhood, especially a gayborhood, to become completely transformed, just as has happened in Thornton Park. There are a number of cities that have experienced a publicized growth in their middle-class and affluent white population. “Places such as San Francisco, Boston, Seattle, or Denver bear witness to the appeal of “fun” cities to the new generation, young adults with relatively high incomes, high mobility and few dependents, and high levels of education and unique skills. The development of a critical mass of such individuals may become a magnet for others like them.”<sup>74</sup>

According to different urbanists today, there are certain keys to “successful cities.” Roberta Gratz writes about the key to city success being its density. She states that “new small businesses, old big businesses, innovative start-ups, street life, public transit, walkability, community connections, diversity and appealing indoor and outdoor entertainment attractions only emerge from or follow density.”<sup>75</sup> Other groups reiterate

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<sup>73</sup> Rushbrook, “Cities, Queer Space, and the Cosmopolitan Tourist,” 2-6.

<sup>74</sup> Bryce, *Revitalizing Cities*, 92.

<sup>75</sup> Bryce, *Revitalizing Cities*, 92.

and add to this list of success by stating that local city officials should recognize, “the desirability and benefits of walkable and rollable, compact, mixed-use, mixed-income, racially diverse, livable urban cores and neighborhoods that are characteristic of ‘cool’ cities.”<sup>76</sup> While not every newly revitalized urban neighborhood has had success with each point mentioned, most have met the majority. Thornton Park is a modern-day example of a successfully revitalized urban neighborhood and shows potential to stay that way.

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<sup>76</sup> “Michigan Land Use Council,” accessed March 3, 2011, [http://www.peopleandland.org/Learn\\_More\\_Documents/MLULC-FINAL\\_REPORT\\_0803.pdf](http://www.peopleandland.org/Learn_More_Documents/MLULC-FINAL_REPORT_0803.pdf)

## **Orlando's Gay History**

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Before the coming of Walt Disney World in 1971, Orlando was a sleepy southern town with conservative cultural and political values. It had established itself as the capital of the citrus belt, which hit its economic peak in 1931. By the 1950s the population was 52,367, which had doubled by 1970. The local economy grew as a result of this influx of new residents to include corporations like; Martin-Marietta, Tupperware and NASA on the nearby Space Coast. Mass transportation soon followed with Interstate 4, the Florida Turnpike, and Orlando International Airport making Orlando an accessible tourist destination. This became a factor that led to the coming of the Disney franchise, which is considered by many who have done research, to be the unofficial beginning of Orlando's gay history. Up until this time there was no real recorded gay history of the Central Florida area.<sup>77</sup>

In 2006 however, there was an attempt to pull together the factual and "largely hearsay-based cultural history of local homosexuality"<sup>78</sup> in Orlando. The finished product was presented by the Metropolitan Business Association – Orlando's gay chamber of commerce – at that year's annual Come Out With Pride Parade. What has remained from this endeavor was the creation of the GLBT Museum of Central Florida, located at the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Community Center, commonly known as The Center, on Mills Avenue. All the information that has been gathered is archived on the museum's website.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Gary R. Mormino. *The Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A social History of Modern Florida* (New York: University Press of Florida, 2005), 26-29.

<sup>78</sup> Billy Manes, "Uncovering Orlando's Gay History isn't Easy ... But someone's Gotta Do It," *Orlando Weekly* (2006): 4.

<sup>79</sup> "Timeline," [www.gayorlandohistory.com](http://www.gayorlandohistory.com), accessed February, 2011.

Included in the archive is a timeline of Orlando's gay history, which begins with the opening of Disney in 1971. Along with tourism, Walt Disney World brought throngs of gays and lesbians to the city of Orlando.<sup>80</sup> The economic value of gay and lesbian tourists has been well documented and shows why the coming of Walt Disney World and its gay travelers have helped to boost the Orlando area economy. Orbitz, a leading online travel company, reports that, "Gay and lesbian travelers represent a valued, lucrative market for travel and leisure companies. They are seven times more likely than the average consumer to take six or more flights in one year and are twice as likely to spend more than \$5,000 on one trip."<sup>81</sup>

Another group that follows the gay traveler is Community Marketing, Inc. It conducts an annual gay and lesbian tourism survey. In 2003 the results stated that, "the majority of travelers surveyed were in committed relationships, fell between the ages of 35-50, hold college or post graduate-level degrees, have incomes ranging from \$40,000 to \$74,000, are in a professional or executive position in their careers, and are comparatively – and increasing – computer and Internet savvy."<sup>82</sup> Their 2009 survey acknowledged the hit of the recession but saw that Orlando still made the Top Ten List of gay traveler destinations.<sup>83</sup> This proves that gay tourists are a lucrative business and Orlando businesses were beginning to take notice.

Orlando area businesses have especially benefited from gay tourists who come to participate in Walt Disney World's Gay Days. While Disney World has never

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<sup>80</sup> "Timeline," [www.gayorlandohistory.com](http://www.gayorlandohistory.com), accessed February, 2011.

<sup>81</sup> Lindy Shepherd, "Under the Rainbow...by the Carolina Moon," *Orlando Weekly* (2003): 3.

<sup>82</sup> Shepherd, "Under the Rainbow...by the Carolina Moon," 3.

"Gay Travel," [www.communitymarketinginc.com](http://www.communitymarketinginc.com), accessed March, 2011.

<sup>83</sup> "Gay Travel," [www.communitymarketinginc.com](http://www.communitymarketinginc.com), accessed March, 2011.

“officially” sanctioned Gay Days, they essentially support the event by not opposing its existence. Gay Days began as a single-day gathering in 1991 and has since grown into a weeklong event that draws about 135,000 visitors annually. “Gay Days organizers estimate that they drop some \$100 million into local coffers with their annual party.”<sup>84</sup> Unfortunately, the public relationship between Disney, local businesses, and Gay Days, has not always been an easy one. In fact, Walt Disney World still has a “don’t ask, don’t tell relationship” with the gay community in Orlando.<sup>85</sup>

At its ten-year anniversary in 2001, Gay Days was still seen by entrepreneurs in the area as a, “vein of gold that Orlando has not yet learned to mine.”<sup>86</sup> Only a few companies openly supported and advertised for the Gay Days events in 2001 including; Gatorland, Sleuths Mystery Dinner Show, and Concha Me Crazy, a restaurant located in the downtown Orlando Embassy Suites hotel. The event organizers suffered from vague letters of support for the event by Orlando Mayor Glenda Hood and Orange County Chairman Rich Crotty, neither of whom specifically mentioned the gay community or Gay Days. Universal Studios took advantage of this financial void and gave their public support of the Gay Days events.<sup>87</sup> With an average of \$100 million up for grabs, besides Universal, greater Orlando businesses and local officials have found it difficult to step outside of their conservative past and show support for the burgeoning gay community.

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<sup>84</sup> Billy Manes, “Gay Days and Disney fall out of love and Kuhn makes it a last call for Scruffy’s,” *Orlando Weekly* (2004): 11.

Tim Barker, “Tourism industry sacrifices profits to avoid controversy,” *Orlando Sentinel* (2001): A1, A8.

<sup>85</sup> Manes, “Gay Days and Disney fall out of love and Kuhn makes it a last call for Scruffy’s,” 11.

<sup>86</sup> Barker, “Tourism industry sacrifices profits to avoid controversy,” A1, A8.

<sup>87</sup> Manes, “Gay Days and Disney fall out of love and Kuhn makes it a last call for Scruffy’s,” 11.

The attitude of support for the gay community has changed since 2001. Today the official Gay Days website boasts sponsorship by Bud Light, along with a listing of other mainstream sponsors including the Esurance auto insurance company, Discovery Cove Orlando and Blue Man Group from Universal Studios.<sup>88</sup> These sponsors are situated alongside gay centered organizations like IGLTA, the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association, the Florida Gay Rodeo Association, and [www.findfred.com](http://www.findfred.com), a men only online dating service. These newly invested sponsors along with the significant increase of participants in Gay Days and other gay-centered events held in Orlando show the growth of the economic power of the gay community in Orlando, Florida.

During the decade of Disney's prominence and the growth of Orlando's gay tourism industry, the local gay community was also steadily growing and developing their own local gay culture. In the 1970s Orlando's first gay bars and clubs opened as well as the formation of the Gay Student Association at Florida Technological University in 1976, later to become the University of Central Florida. The 1970s not only marks the beginning of growth in Orlando's gay tourism but also growth in the local gay community.

The well-known gay bars and clubs that opened during 1970s and 1980s were due to a well-known gay "rat pack" including; Mike Hodge, William Miller, Jan Koren, Wally Wood, and Sue Hanna. They were considered pioneers by taking on the risky

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<sup>88</sup> "What is Gay Days?" [www.gaydays.com](http://www.gaydays.com), accessed February, 2011.

business of opening gay and lesbian bars in Orlando.<sup>89</sup> Some of the bars they helped to open were the Parliament House, Hanks, and Faces. Both the Parliament House and Franks are still staples of Orlando gay nightlife. Faces, Orlando's first all-lesbian bar, unfortunately closed recently due to the owner's death. These bars have long been historical symbols of the gay community and culture Orlando.

The Parliament House Motor Inn has always been at the center of Orlando's gay history scene. "Snugged between Rock Lake and Orange Blossom Trail, the motel was a leftover from the pre-Disney days of the 1950s and 1960s when travelers made their way by automobile through town via the Trail, seeking fishing spots and sunshine."<sup>90</sup> After the coming of Walt Disney World, the Parliament House Motor Inn continued to steadily lose business and quickly became a haven for drugs and prostitutes, reminiscent of the gay ghettos of the early 1900s. Gay couple, William Miller and Michael Hodge, bought the run-down motel in 1975. The couple was already an established gay real-estate development duo and was fervently supported by the increasingly active gay community quietly growing in Orlando. They also had a hand in opening other gay establishments in town like the Diamond Head, The Palace Club, and the Loading Dock.<sup>91</sup>

The Parliament House thrived throughout the late 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, but then the AIDS epidemic hit hard. The first bump in the road for the P House was the death of one of its owners, William Miller, in 1987. The financial situation of the P House was left to co-owner Michael Hodge, who also had AIDS, and his brother,

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<sup>89</sup> Billy Manes, "Uncovering Orlando's Gay History isn't easy...but Someone's Gotta do it," *Orlando Weekly* (2006): 11-12.

"Timeline," [www.gayorlandohistory.com](http://www.gayorlandohistory.com), accessed March, 2011.

<sup>90</sup> Shepherd, "Under the Rainbow...by the Carolina Moon," 5.

<sup>91</sup> Shepherd, "Under the Rainbow...by the Carolina Moon," 5.

Sammy Hodge, who was married and lived in Lakeland. The second bump was felt with the AIDS related death of Hodge, leaving all administrative duties to his straight brother, Sammy. The P House went through tough times financially at this point in its history. Through the second half of the 1990s, The Parliament House suffered from a lack of income, the property deteriorating as well as the patrons. “Hustlers and drifters of all types were entrenched in the surrounding area, which was plagued with criminal activity. To visit the club could be dangerous just getting from the parking lot to the inside, but it was still wildly popular.”<sup>92</sup>

In the summer of 1999, a straight couple, Don Granastein and Susan Unger, bought the Parliament House and began their own redevelopment and revitalization project. They bought the P House and the immediate surrounding property with the intention of pursuing a time-share project. The couple planned to invest \$20 million dollars to build the Parliament House Resort time share unit, which later became called The Gardens. Ground was broken in January of 2005 and is now currently open for reservations.<sup>93</sup> The Parliament House and The Gardens boast to be the world’s largest all gay resort and entertainment complex.<sup>94</sup>

The growth of the Parliament House and Disney’s Gay Days played significant roles in Orlando’s gay economic growth. This gay fueled economic growth is also demonstrated by the significant growth in popularity and attendance of Orlando’s Come Out With Pride Parade which has been held every October since its small beginning in

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<sup>92</sup> Shepherd, “Under the Rainbow...by the Carolina Moon,” 5.

<sup>93</sup> Shepherd, “Under the Rainbow...by the Carolina Moon,” 5.

“P House History,” [www.parliamenthouse.com](http://www.parliamenthouse.com), accessed March, 2011.

“Gay Time Share,” [www.thegardensorlando.com](http://www.thegardensorlando.com), accessed March, 2011.

<sup>94</sup> “P House History,” [www.parliamenthouse.com](http://www.parliamenthouse.com), accessed March, 2011.



1992. Orlando's Pride Parade history began with a small rally in 1992 in front of City Hall in the name of equality for the LGBT community. In 2005, an inspired group of community LGBT leaders in Orlando decided to move the Pride Parade and rally to align with the National Coming Out Day event on October 11.<sup>95</sup> MBA Orlando (Metropolitan Business Association), Orlando's LGBT Chamber of Commerce, is the official organizer of the Come Out With Pride Parade every year.<sup>96</sup>

The current MBA Orlando Board President, Gina Duncan, states that like Gay Days, the Come Out With Pride Parade did not, until recently, have open support from local businesses and politicians. Duncan estimates that as late as 2006 local politicians were reluctant to participate or give any type of public support to the annual event which was drawing tens of thousands of gay and gay friendly consumers to downtown Orlando. MBA Orlando organizers had to "beg and plead"<sup>97</sup> with local politicians to gain any sort of public support for the annual event. Since then, the attitude, much like that surrounding Gay Days, has changed and local officials and politicians openly provide their support of and participation in the events.<sup>98</sup>

The year 2006 marked other significant changes and a rapid shift of acceptance of the LGBT community in the Orlando area. That same year Billy Manes, an *Orlando Weekly* columnist and an openly gay man who ran for Mayor in 2005, wrote an article on

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<sup>95</sup> "History," [www.mbaorlando.org](http://www.mbaorlando.org), accessed January, 2011.

<sup>96</sup> "History," [www.mbaorlando.org](http://www.mbaorlando.org), accessed January, 2011.

Gina Duncan, interview by author, Winter Park, January 27, 2011, tape in possession of author.

Debbie Simmons, interview by author, Winter Park, March 10, 2011, email in possession of author.

<sup>97</sup> Gina Duncan, interview by author, Winter Park, January 27, 2011, tape in possession of author.

<sup>98</sup> Gina Duncan, interview by author, Winter Park, January 27, 2011, tape in possession of author.  
Debbie Simmons, interview by author, Winter Park, March 10, 2011, email in possession of author.

the “gayness” of Orlando.<sup>99</sup> In 2006 there was an ever growing list of gay bars and clubs, a Publix Supermarket with the reputation of being the “Gay Publix”, an Orlando Gay Chorus, an openly gay real-estate magnate developing Thornton Park and other parts of downtown, an openly gay politician, a gay weekly magazine, gay time-shares and of course, there is still Disney World and Gay Days.

In 2011 more of the same could be added to that list as well as a national ranking by *The Advocate*, one of the country’s largest gay magazines, of Orlando as being the fourth “gayest city” in America.<sup>100</sup> The path of Orlando’s gay history has not been a smooth one, but it has led to a climate of increased acceptance which attracts many gay tourists and residents to this day. Thornton Park is the fountain head of this phenomenon and represents the new attitude of Orlando’s residents.

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<sup>99</sup> “Timeline,” [www.gayorlandohistory.com](http://www.gayorlandohistory.com), accessed March, 2011.

Manes, “Uncovering Orlando’s Gay History isn’t easy...but Someone’s Gotta do it,” 11-12.

<sup>100</sup> Mike Albo, “Gayest Cities in America,” *The Advocate* ( 2011): 16.

## **Introduction to Thornton Park: The New Gayborhood**

Orlando's gay culture has grown steadily since the late 1960s and early 1970s. According to *Orlando Weekly* author, Cynthia Barnett, the trendiest enclave in the city of Orlando, Thornton Park, also happens to be a gayborhood.<sup>101</sup> The neighborhood achieved this distinction due to the influence the LGBT community has had in its development and revitalization since the 1990s. While other well-known gay neighborhoods are clearly marked as gay districts that cater towards gay clientele and residents, Thornton Park is significantly different. Thornton Park remains a sought after destination for both gay and straight residents, businesses, and visitors. It is home to many of Orlando's upscale restaurants, shops and spas that are not only frequented by the neighborhood residents but also by visitors from other parts of the greater Orlando area.

Many people would not recognize Thornton Park as a gayborhood because it is not marked with rainbow flags like the gayborhoods of the 1960s and 1970s, or current well-known gay communities like the Castro District of San Francisco, Atlanta's Mid-Town, or Chicago's Boystown. These gayborhoods are well-known and distinctly marked as having a high amount of gay and gay-friendly residents. The differences between these neighborhoods and Thornton Park define the newest version of the gayborhood. While Thornton Park was a gay-developed community with still a significant number of gay residents and businesses, it does not need to advertise itself as being gay and invites everyone to join in the open atmosphere and culture that it provides. Agreeing with this notion is the real estate developer most responsible for the

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<sup>101</sup>Cynthia Barnett, "City Slickers," *Florida Trend* (2001): 60-61.

revitalization of Thornton Park, Phil Rappy. He believes that, “neighborhoods belong to everybody. A neighborhood should be a good place for all people to live and enjoy.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Phil Rappy, interview by author, Orlando, April 14, 2011, tape in possession of author.

## **Thornton Park Pre-Revitalization**

Before the 1990s, Thornton Park was a very different neighborhood compared to the trendy scene that it is today. According to past residents like Stacey Matrazzo and current residents like Patrick James, Jennifer Foster, and influential developer, Phil Rampy, as late as 1988 and even into 1990 and 1991 the area now called Thornton Park was not always a safe place to walk. This was due to the predominantly lower-income demographic of the neighborhood as well as the frequency of transients and homeless.<sup>103</sup> Demonstrating the environment of the neighborhood at the time, Patrick James stated that, “if you looked at all like a yuppie, and took the risk of walking the streets of Thornton Park, expect the possibility of getting a beer can thrown at you.”<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, the physical state of the neighborhood before the 1990s was one of vacant lots, parking lots, flop houses, a crack house and an empty Lake Eola. Before Phil Rampy and others named the run-down area Thornton Park and began the clean-up, they had a difficult time cultivating any financial interest in area.<sup>105</sup>

Stacey Matrazzo was a young resident of Thornton Park, 19 and 20 years old, during 1990 and 1991, before major change began to happen. She lived at 911 ½ E. Central Boulevard, on the corner of Central and James. Her landlord at the time was in the middle of transitioning the house back to a single family home from a rental property, which was previously owned by a gay man dying of Aids. Stacey recalls her time living

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<sup>103</sup> Barnett, “City Slickers,” 60-61.

Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author.

Stacey Matrazzo, e-mail interview by author, April 4, 2011, e-mail in possession of author.

Jennifer Foster, interview by author, Orlando, February 3, 2011, tape in possession of author.

<sup>104</sup> Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author.

<sup>105</sup> Barnett, “City Slickers,” 60-61.

Phil Rampy, Interview by Author, Orlando, April 14, 2011, tape in possession of author.

in Thornton Park and states that, “I miss the edge that the neighborhood used to have, but the elements that brought that edge to the neighborhood are certainly not missed, and although I never felt unsafe when I lived there, I was aware of those unsafe or at least risky elements, and they do not feel present now.”<sup>106</sup> This makes reference to the same sentiment felt by Patrick James of the pre-1990s poor state of the neighborhood.

A contributing factor to the unfortunate state of Thornton Park before the 1990s was the presence of the well-known flophouse located on the corner of Washington and Hyer.<sup>107</sup> The structure still exists today but has been significantly refurbished. Matrazzo described the flophouse as a large wooden home with a staircase visible from the street. She stated that, “back then, there were mostly kids my age living or crashing there. I never went in; I was always told that you weren't allowed in unless you were staying there. They didn't let people hang out and party there; just crash. I don't know who "they" were, though.”<sup>108</sup> She does, however, remember partying outside and around the house often.

Matrazzo also remembers the neighborhood crack house. It was located across the street from the 7-11 Convenient Store, which is still open today. She recalls that, “it was a, 2-story wooden house, much like all the other homes in the area. It was yellow-gold in color I think. I don't know if it even had any windows or doors, just open frames. I knew someone who stayed there, but he wouldn't let me see inside. I knew a lot of transients back then. Most were intentionally transient and held down temporary jobs,

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<sup>106</sup> Stacey Matrazzo, e-mail interview by author, April 4, 2011, e-mail in possession of author.

<sup>107</sup> Stacey Matrazzo, e-mail interview by author, April 4, 2011, e-mail in possession of author.  
Patrick James, e-mail interview by author, February 16, 2011, e-mail in possession of author.

<sup>108</sup> Stacey Matrazzo, e-mail interview by author, April 4, 2011, e-mail in possession of author.

but one in particular, I later realized, had quite the drug habit. Hence my knowledge of the crack house.”<sup>109</sup> Both the crack house and the flop house were centers of drugs, alcohol and other crime in the neighborhood. This added to the overall neglected state of the area.

While the neighborhood was primarily in a state of neglect during the 1980s and early 1990s, there were pockets of wealthier residents with well-kept homes. According to Matrazzo, “James Street was fairly family-friendly. But just two short blocks from me on Hill and Central was a house that I think had been abandoned, was redone but poorly and went to shit again.”<sup>110</sup> Other than the few homes that were well-kept many others were owned by residents without the financial means to maintain them and therefore, were often in different positions of ruin. The majority of the uninhabited homes and empty lots in the neighborhood were for sale, and while there seemed to be pockets of progress, the overall state of Thornton Park before the mid-1990s was not pleasant.

As a result of the lack of residents with disposable income there was also a lack of local businesses in the neighborhood. One of the few businesses open before significant change came to Thornton Park was American Plumbing Supply. The store opened its doors in the early 1960s but, according to Patrick James, “owner Julius Blum, rarely kept regular hours of operation. Often times when you needed something you would walk to the hardware store and it would be closed.”<sup>111</sup> Also on that same block, “on Washington, there was Burton's [bar], but that was very scary back then. Not the friendly, open

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<sup>109</sup> Stacey Matrazzo, e-mail interview by author, April 4, 2011 e-mail in possession of author.

<sup>110</sup> Stacey Matrazzo, e-mail interview by author, April 4, 2011 e-mail in possession of author.

<sup>111</sup> Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author.

environment that it is now. It was definitely a place for regulars and drunks. There was also the Laundromat, which is still there, and one of the old houses had an antique (read: junk) shop in it. I think the owners were just hoarders who needed to legitimate their problem. It's next to what is now Dexter's Restaurant," states Stacey Matrazzo<sup>112</sup> One of Matrazzo's favorite businesses at the time was the neighborhood youth hostel on the corner of Robinson and Lake Eola. The building was severely damaged by a fire and has since been renovated into the EO Inn and Spa with the Panera Bread Company downstairs.

The businesses located in the neighborhood prior to the mid-1990s were sparse and geared toward low-income patrons. Besides the 7-11 Convenient Store located along Summerlin Avenue between Washington Street and Central Boulevard there were a lot of vacant lots and empty buildings. Across Washington from the 7-11, where Anthony's Pizza now resides, was once a run-down gas station and where both the now wildly popular Wildside BBQ restaurant and the mixed-use Thornton Park Center building, there were nothing but two vacant lots.<sup>113</sup> This strip along Summerlin Avenue between Washington Street and Central Boulevard is now the economic epicenter of Thornton Park today. Where there was once virtually nothing, there is now a vibrant local economy and culture as a result of the influx of new residents and new businesses starting in the mid-1990s.

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<sup>112</sup> Stacey Matrazzo, e-mail interview by author, April 4, 2011 e-mail in possession of author.

<sup>113</sup> Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author. Stacey Matrazzo, e-mail interview by author, April 4, 2011 e-mail in possession of author.



## **Thornton Park: The Transition**

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This sad state of Thornton Park changed with the influence of affluent gay men and women like Phil Rampy. Phil Rampy, a gay real-estate developer, and his network of gay friends and business partners, played the central role in revitalizing Thornton Park in the mid-1990s through the 2000s. Rampy is currently President, Owner, and Broker of Record of Olde Town Brokers located in the middle of the Thornton Park neighborhood on Summerlin Avenue. He came to Orlando by way of Alabama as an architecture student at Auburn University. While visiting the Orlando area for the first time during the Spring Break of his fourth year at Auburn, Rampy quit school, moved to Orlando and attended the University of Central Florida where he changed his degree to business management. In 1988 he purchased his first home on Thornton Park Avenue for \$60,000, refurbished it in his unique style. From 1988 to 2001 the home was bought and sold three times with the latest price going for over \$200,000. The remodel of this small bungalow led Phil Rampy down the path of more revitalization projects in the neighborhood, most, however on a much larger scale.<sup>114</sup>

In 1992 Rampy convinced his father to co-sign a loan for him to purchase and refurbish the old sandwich shop in the neighborhood and turned it into the Thornton Park Café. In 1994, Phil Rampy founded Olde Town Realty with a core group of agents, including Patrick James and his business partner Craig Ustler, who were all instrumental in changing Thornton Park into what it is today. Phil Rampy and his group of friends are even credited with naming Thornton Park after the road where his 1988 house was

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<sup>114</sup> Barnett, "City Slickers," 60-61.

Jeff Truesdell, "Curtains for Downtown," *Orlando Weekly* (1999).

located, Thornton Park Avenue.<sup>115</sup> This marked the beginning of an era of major development and revitalization in the Thornton Park neighborhood.

Phil Rampy was responsible for other major developments in Thornton Park including the Eo Inn and Thornton Park Central. Rampy turned the burnt-out youth hostel into a chic inn and spa which attracts upper-class clients daily. Also included with the renovation was the addition of a new restaurant and café, Panera Bread Company. The most significant development by Rampy and business partner Craig Ustler was Thornton Park Central. Thornton Park Central is an urban mixed-use building which runs most of the length of Summerlin Avenue starting at Central Boulevard in the center of Thornton Park. The \$31 million project includes retail space, office space, condominiums, as well as a well hidden parking garage. TPC opened in January of 2002 and is home to up-scale restaurants like Hue, Shari Sushi, and Cityfish as well as high-end stores like Zou Zou Boutique and Urban Body Men's Clothing.<sup>116</sup> Thornton Park Central is the focal point of the neighborhood and serves as a hub of entertainment, business and urban living.

While Phil Rampy played a significant role in the development of Thornton Park, there were also a number of other gay developers and private individuals, who were doing much of the work in the neighborhood as Phil Rampy. According to resident and

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<sup>115</sup> Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author. Jennifer Foster, interview by author, Orlando, February 3, 2011, tape in possession of author. Shelbie Norwich, e-mail interview by author, April 1, 2011, e-mail in possession of author. Truesdell, "Curtains for Downtown," 6.

<sup>116</sup> "Thornton Park Central," [www.tpcstory.com](http://www.tpcstory.com), accessed April, 2011. Barnett, "City Slickers," 60-61. Truesdell, "Curtains for Downtown," 6.

real-estate broker, Patrick James, “it was a web of gay friends, many who knew Rumpy, who came in and began the inside out revitalization of Thornton Park.”<sup>117</sup> Once people saw what was being accomplishing in the neighborhood they jumped in and quickly followed suit. This snowball effect caused the majority of the old homes in the neighborhood to be bought and remodeled by affluent gay men and women. This flood of people and renovation happened rather quickly according to James. He estimated that the majority of the home development happened in a span of only about seven years.<sup>118</sup>

As a result of the revival of the neighborhood by the gay community, straight developers were also drawn in to invest. This domino effect is how other gay neighborhoods have also gotten their start. Gays and lesbians are enticed by the quaintness of the historic architecture and the affordability of the property. As the gay community takes a foothold in the neighborhood and begins beautifying the area, the rest of the city is forced to pay attention and take part in the revitalization efforts. Where previous gayborhoods have remained to be gay-centered districts with gay bars and rainbow flags, Thornton Park has continued to grow as, “a diverse neighborhood that belongs to everybody.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author.

<sup>118</sup> Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author.  
Shelbie Norwich, e-mail interview by author, April 1, 2011, e-mail in possession of author.  
Gina Duncan, interview by author, Winter Park, January 27, 2011, tape in possession of author.

<sup>119</sup> Phil Rumpy interview by author, April 2011, tape in possession of author.

## **The Effects of Revitalization**

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The transition of any neighborhood, Thornton Park included, from run-down to upscale has both positive and negative consequences. In fact, some of these positive and negative consequences happen concurrently. For example, a result of an influx of affluent people who refurbish homes in a neighborhood is an increase in property values. While those who wish to sell stand to profit, those who wish to remain must pay higher taxes on their property. Renters are also affected by the rise in property taxes raising their rents. Depending on what side of the coin a resident sits determines their like or dislike for the revitalization efforts.

Patrick James, a gay real-estate agent with Olde Town Brokers, came into the neighborhood in the early 1990s and provides specific examples of the change in Thornton Park property values. James explains that at the same time of Thornton Park's renewal, the United States was experiencing the beginning the Housing Bubble. The Housing Bubble caused housing prices to soar, hitting its peak in 2006. James provided two of the homes he purchased and refurbished as examples of both the revitalization of Thornton Park as well as the real-estate boom that was occurring across the rest of the country.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author. , Lawrence Roberts, *The Great Housing Bubble: Why Did Prices Fall?* (New York: Montgomery Cyperess, LLC, 2008) 101-105.

**Example #1:**<sup>121</sup>

<u>Address</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Purchase Price</u>	
<u>Notes</u>			
1005 E. Jefferson St.	1990	\$57,000	First Remodel
	1990 (Dec.)	\$105,000	
	1998	\$138,000	
	1999	\$167,000	
	2001	\$196,000	Patrick James,
Remodeled			
	2006	\$320,000	

**Example #2:**<sup>122</sup>

<u>Address</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Purchase Price</u>	
<u>Notes</u>			
447 N. Shine Ave.	1988	\$150,000	
	1998	\$205,000	Patrick James,
Remodeled			
	2001	\$367,000	
	2006	\$522,500	

According to James both homes are worth significantly less now following suit with the rest of the state of Florida after the burst of the Housing Bubble in 2007. The Jefferson house is estimated to be worth about \$179,000 - \$196,000 and the Shine Avenue home is now worth around \$274,000.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author. "property search," <http://www.ocpafl.org/>, accessed January, 2011.

<sup>122</sup> Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author. "property search," <http://www.ocpafl.org/>, accessed January, 2011.

<sup>123</sup> Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author.

A result of the surge of wealthy gay and straight people moving into the neighborhood was an increased need for entertainment establishments and businesses. The increase of high-end businesses also helped increase the overall property value of land in the neighborhood. Two specific examples are new businesses which were established in place of a vacant lot and a run-down gas station causing a significant land value increase. These businesses also happen to be two of the most popular restaurants in Thornton Park, Anthony's Pizza and Wildside BBQ.

**Example #1:<sup>124</sup>**

<b><u>Address/Business Price</u></b>	<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Purchase</u></b>
Anthony's Pizza:	1981	\$44,500
(100 N. Summerlin Ave.)	1988	\$115,000
	1997	\$205,000

**Example #2:<sup>125</sup>**

<b><u>Business/Address Price</u></b>	<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Purchase</u></b>
Wild Side BBQ:	1978	\$46,500
(700 E. Washington St.)	1996	\$175,000
	2000	\$270,000
	2007	\$1,300,000

<sup>124</sup> "property search," <http://www.ocpaf.org/>, accessed January, 2011.

<sup>125</sup> "property search," <http://www.ocpaf.org/>, accessed January, 2011.

The increased need for superior places of business and entertainment by the new residents is one of the countless positive effects of revitalization. Jennifer Foster, a lesbian, moved to the neighborhood in 2001, during the height of its transition. Foster, as well as many others, both gay and straight, was attracted to the area because of the quaint architecture of the small bungalow homes, the narrow tree-lined streets, and the walkability of the restaurants, bars, and shops.<sup>126</sup> Jennifer Foster and her partner enjoyed the lifestyle of walking to their favorite restaurant for dinner or to Starbucks for a cup of coffee. Foster even established her own business, Foster Productions, Inc. in Thornton Park and lives just two blocks away. Foster states that she likes having convenient access to downtown but at the same time enjoys not being located in the middle of the hustle and bustle of city life. Thornton Park offers a genuine neighborhood feel within an urban space.<sup>127</sup>

Another factor that attracts gays, lesbians and straights is the intangible element of openness and acceptance felt while walking the streets of Thornton Park.<sup>128</sup> The culture of the neighborhood has significantly changed with the arrival of gay and lesbian residents to the area. Due to the number of gay and gay-friendly residents living in Thornton Park, a sense of acceptance and openness has grown. This shift in attitude has been experienced by those who have lived in the neighborhood for some time as well as

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<sup>126</sup> Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author. Jennifer Foster, interview by author, Orlando, February 3, 2011, tape in possession of author. Debbie Simmons, e-mail interview by author, March 10, 2011, e-mail in possession of author.

<sup>127</sup> Jennifer Foster, interview by author, Orlando, February 3, 2011, tape in possession of author.

<sup>128</sup> Jennifer Foster, interview by author, Orlando, February 3, 2011, tape in possession of author. Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author. Gina Duncan, interview by author, Winter Park, January 27, 2011, tape in possession of author.

by those who are new to the area. Resident Jennifer Foster, Patrick James as well as nearby resident Gina Duncan, who is transgender, claim this culture to be a main reason for choosing to live in Thornton Park. Foster states that, “she likes the fact that she’s able to walk down the street with her partner and hold her hand and they feel like they are the norm instead of the minority in the neighborhood.”<sup>129</sup>

Foster and others also claim that this same gay-friendly culture, combined with the unique restaurants, shops, and bars, also attracts affluent straight residents and visitors to Thornton Park making it very diverse. Patrick James, Gina Duncan, and Jennifer Foster all stated that they believe straight people are attracted to the same feeling of openness, tolerance, and acceptance felt by gay residents in the neighborhood. Gina Duncan believes that, “they too feel they can visit Thornton Park and be themselves with no fear of being chastised for being different.”<sup>130</sup> This harkens back to the gay villages of the early 1900s where people of all types, gay and straight, sought out the culture of acceptance in places like Greenwich Village and Harlem.

A residual effect of the gay driven revitalization of Thornton Park is the increase of gay focused and gay friendly organizations in the city of Orlando. The existence of gay and gay-friendly organizations is used as an indicator of the growing gay culture of cities by gay friendly real estate firms and travel companies. Magazines like *The Advocate*, use statistics like these to indicate the “openness” of a city which in turn

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<sup>129</sup> Jennifer Foster, interview by author, Orlando, February 3, 2011, tape in possession of author. Gina Duncan, interview by author, Winter Park, January 27, 2011, tape in possession of author. Stacey Matrazzo, e-mail interview by author, April 4, 2011 e-mail in possession of author. Shelbie Norwich, e-mail interview by author, April 1, 2011, e-mail in possession of author. Patrick James, e-mail interview by author, February 16, 2011, e-mail in possession of author.

<sup>130</sup> Gina Duncan, interview by author, Winter Park, January 27, 2011, tape in possession of author.



attracts more gay residents and tourists to the Orlando area.<sup>131</sup> This is important to Orlando along with any other growing city because can lead to growth in their local economy. The growth of the gay community, in conjunction with the growth of Thornton Park, has helped advance the local economy in the city of Orlando.

One of the major players in this economic growth spurt has been MBA Orlando and their Come Out with Pride event. Debbie Simmons, the first president and one of the original founders of the MBA (Metropolitan Business Association) Orlando, which formed in 1992 as Central Florida's GLBT chamber of commerce, has led the way for economic, political and public gay activism in Orlando. Simmons provided examples of the political successes MBA Orlando has achieved: "Result of many MBA political candidates' forums/town hall meetings: City of Orlando policy and procedure implementation in September 2000 to protect 3200 city employees from discrimination based on sexual orientation which also applies to sexual harassment. Chief of Police Michael McCoy changes policy to stop discrimination against gay officers."<sup>132</sup> These were significant political triumphs for the Orlando gay community. The largest public achievement, although, is the annual Come Out With Pride Orlando event.

Come Out With Pride is culturally and economically important to the city of Orlando and Thornton Park businesses. MBA Orlando's chief purpose today is the planning and implementation of the event each year. The concept of Come Out With Pride came to fruition in 2005, after 5 years of softly nudging the community to move in

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<sup>131</sup> Albo, "Gayest Cities in America," 16.

<sup>132</sup> Debbie Simmons, e-mail interview by author, March 10, 2011, e-mail in possession of author. Gina Duncan, interview by author, Winter Park, January 27, 2011, tape in possession of author.

this direction.<sup>133</sup> The event was planned together by MBA Orlando and the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Student Union (GLBSU) of the University of Central Florida. They planned the event to coincide with the National Coming Out Day on October 11 which began in 1988. The day was to include entertainment, vendors, speakers, exhibitors, food, and beverages followed by a Pride Parade as its closing. Thornton Park plays a vital role in this event by hosting the majority of the parade route and by showing off the local gay community's pride.

The revitalization of Thornton Park as well as the increased economic growth due to events like Come Out With Pride and others, attracted more than just residents and patrons to the area. The support of such events by Orlando city officials also significantly improved. Gina Duncan states that, "as late as five years ago Orlando city officials were reluctant to participate and show public support for events like Come Out With Pride. But over the past five years that has significantly changed and aides to those same city officials who once waned their support, now call MBA Orlando representatives and ask when their boss is scheduled to speak at the event."<sup>134</sup> The involvement of the LGBT community in the development of Thornton Park has not only provided multiple benefits to the neighborhood itself, but also to the greater city of Orlando.

While there are many significant gains that have been made by this revitalization, there are also some perceived negative results expressed by people who have lived in the neighborhood. Former resident Stacey Matrazzo posits, "that while the loss of the flop houses, the neighborhood crack house and the overall beautification of the neighborhood

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<sup>133</sup> Debbie Simmons, e-mail interview by author, March 10, 2011, e-mail in possession of author.

<sup>134</sup> Gina Duncan, interview by author, Winter Park, January 27, 2011, tape in possession of author.

are great improvements on Thornton Park”<sup>135</sup>, she does feel, as stated in the previous section, that the community has lost its “edge.” The culture of the neighborhood has changed significantly, some feel for the better, others feel for the worse. Matrazzo feels that the neighborhood is, “gentrified now and even less gayified”<sup>136</sup>, as it was in the early transition period. Because of this she feels that the residents and businesses of Thornton Park are now less friendly to homeless and needy individuals as it once was.<sup>137</sup>

Patrick James observes similar changes but sees the overall benefits of the neighborhood becoming more vibrant and safe as more important. He also recognizes the fact that while some of the original residents chose and were able to stay in the neighborhood, many sold their homes and moved to other areas of Central Florida. The displacement of the original residents is often an adverse side-effect of urban revitalization, and has been recognized in the development of Thornton Park as well. Although, James does not feel the level of displacement was as extreme way as other well-known gentrified neighborhoods. He and others like Gina Duncan and Jennifer Foster feel that the transition was more organic and natural.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Stacey Matrazzo, e-mail interview by author, April 4, 2011 e-mail in possession of author.

<sup>136</sup> Stacey Matrazzo, e-mail interview by author, April 4, 2011 e-mail in possession of author.

<sup>137</sup> Stacey Matrazzo, e-mail interview by author, April 4, 2011 e-mail in possession of author.

Patrick James, interview by the author, Orlando, February 11, 2011, tape in possession of author.  
Gina Duncan, interview by author, Winter Park, January 27, 2011, tape in possession of author.  
Jennifer Foster, interview by author, Orlando, February 3, 2011, tape in possession of author.

## **Conclusion**

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Thornton Park differs from gay districts of the past, therefore making it the newest version. As American society and the American city has transformed throughout history, so has the gayborhood. At first, the gay ghetto was used by a city as a means of containment for their poor, ethnic minorities, and other so called “undesirables.” This tool of confinement evolved into a gay village which attracted people due to the moral freedoms and access to income it provided. The height of gay activism in the 1960s and 1970s caused the gay village to evolve into the gay neighborhood where gays and lesbians less restricted in public and both their economic and political power grew in the city.

The final transition from gay neighborhood to gayborhood is still taking place in neighborhoods like Thornton Park in Orlando, Florida. This most recent version is one of ultimate acceptance of the gay community by the surrounding city. The Thornton Park gayborhood is a place of culture, of economic and political power as well as a sought after place of residence by all, not just gays and lesbians. The major difference between the gay neighborhood of the 1960s and 1970s and Thornton Park is that there is no need to mark itself as a gay district with rainbow flags on the street lamps or loud gay bars on every corner. It is a diverse community where being gay is the accepted norm. Thornton Park has not only become Orlando’s best known gayborhood, it is also one of Orlando’s preeminent neighborhoods, period.

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